

Barak's Victory with God

God wants us to worship Him, and Him alone. So He gave Israel clear instructions when they had completed their journey to the promised land: drive out the occupants from the land and destroy their worship and culture, or *“those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides”* (Numbers 33:55).

Why? Because God did not want Israel to become like the inhabitants of Canaan, who worshipped almost anything except God Himself. Sadly, Israel did fail to drive them out, and so their neighbours were often their enemies.

Oppression

We take up the story in Judges chapter 4, when Israel had had peace for 80 years. They started worshipping idols, so God ‘sold them’ into the hand of King Jabin, whose capital city was near Mount Carmel. The land became depopulated, and marauding bands stole any goods or crops. Today we would call it guerrilla warfare.

Jabin’s garrison town was Hazor, the military hub of Canaan and the largest of Biblical towns, numbering 40,000 inhabitants. They had chariots of iron, and were quite ruthless. Imagine being armed only with a sword or javelin, standing on your own two feet in open-toed sandals, with an army coming towards you. That army has 900 chariots of iron, each with two horses and a driver, plus a marksman with bow and arrow! With this powerful force, it is easy to picture how the Canaanites were able to oppress Israel for 20 years.

Now Jabin, with his commander Sisera, was going to launch a full-scale attack on the Israelites.

Israel did not have a king at this time: ‘Judges’ ruled them. The current Judge was a lady called Deborah. She would sit under a palm tree and people came to her with their disputes. When Deborah gave her verdict, the people accepted it.

A Challenge

Deborah sent for Barak and told him that God had commanded him to go to Mount Tabor with 10,000 soldiers. God would bring Sisera there so that He could help Barak defeat the Canaanite army.

Barak was completely taken aback and very frightened, but obeyed the command. He told Deborah that he would go into battle, but only if she went with him. She agreed to accompany him telling him that God promised he would win the battle. However, because Barak was afraid, God would sell the captain of the enemy into the hands of a woman, and she would get the glory. Deborah went with Barak, but she did not lead the battle: she supported Barak as he assembled his army.

Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, gathered his troops and his 900 chariots of iron. Being informed where Barak and his ill-equipped army were camped, they came to the river Kishon to do battle.

Barak, meanwhile, was camped near the top of Mount Tabor, and so was able to see Sisera with his great army and chariots in the valley below.

Barak would have a perfect view: in fact he would be able to see right across the plain to Mount Carmel, some ten miles away. It would not have been a comforting sight: archaeologists have discovered pictures and fragments of these chariots and they would have been terrifying.



God's Battle

So, Sisera mustered his forces, but so did God! Deborah says to Barak, "*The LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand*" (Judges 4:14).

God was going to defeat Sisera, his army, and his chariots. This was God's battle, on behalf of His people. And He would do so in an amazing way. Firstly, He gave Barak's army the upper hand and they thoroughly defeated the Canaanites. Then nature played a part: Deborah and Barak's song records in Judges 5:21 that "*the torrent of Kishon swept them away*".

The river Kishon, meandering gently along the flat and level Esdralon plain, is unpredictable. It is often dry, but liable to swell and flood very suddenly without warning, especially in spring after the snow melts from Mount Tabor. The result is mud that is just impassable. Sisera tried to get away and had to flee on foot, maybe because his chariot was caught in the

torrent, or in the boggy morass caused by the sudden flooding.

This actually happened in the Battle of Mount Tabor in April 1799. The muddy ground on the banks of the Kishon flooded and became impassable, so many of the Turkish army were drowned.

So maybe Sisera's chariot, along with the rest of his forces, was bogged down by a storm deliberately sent by God. Judges 5:22 describes how the horses' hooves pounded and the chariots and army of Sisera were completely destroyed by Israel.

Complete Victory

Sisera fled for his life and came to the tent of his ally, Heber. Heber's wife, Jael, saw him coming, went out to meet him, and invited him into her tent for 'safety'. Having covered him with a rug, she gave him some fermented (slightly intoxicating) milk and he fell into a deep sleep.

It is possible that Jael, having heard of the amazing defeat of Sisera's army, decided to side with the victors, and so with God. Certainly, as the commander slept, she drove a tent peg right into his head with a hammer. She then showed Sisera's body to Barak, proving correct Deborah's prophecy that the glory of success would go to a woman. Israel then had peace, at least until the next time they disobeyed God.

God wants us to be His children, and obey Him, just like Israel should have done. If we choose not to, then we must bear the consequences. Our only hope of deliverance from death is through the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That battle has been won: our job is to have faith in God's saving power, just like Barak.

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